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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 RIYADH 000962

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [SA](#) [SY](#) [LE](#) [AF](#) [PK](#) [IR](#) [XF](#)  
SUBJECT: SAUDI MINISTER FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS MADANI  
DISCUSSES REGIONAL ISSUES

REF: A. SECSTATE 71829  
[B](#). SECSTATE 71850  
[C](#). SECSTATE 74362

Classified By: CHARGE AMBASSADOR RICHARD ERDMAN, REASONS 1.4 (B) & (D)

SUMMARY AND COMMENT  
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[1](#)1. (C) During a July 20 meeting Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Nizar Madani accepted Charge's congratulations on his appointment by the King to another 4-year term; praised President Obama's efforts on the Middle East and the recent meeting with the Quartet in Trieste; and focused on the negatives in Netanyahu's recent speech, noting the Palestinian state he envisioned was a "ghost state." Consistent with the current Saudi policy of speaking positively about U.S. peace efforts but doing little or nothing concrete to assist them, he described the current situation as "an historic opportunity" that "we can't miss." In contrast to his pessimism on prospects for Palestinian reconciliation, Madani expressed cautious optimism that Saad Hariri would be able to form a government and confirmed Saudi relations with Syria were improving but dependent on Syrian good behavior. On Iran, Madani said it was not yet clear whether the current unrest was a "tempest in a teapot" or a prelude to a 1979-type upheaval, while noting that prolonged instability in Iran was not in the long-term interest of the Kingdom. Citing the case of a U.S.-educated, former Deputy Finance Minister and Shoura Council member, Madani complained about serious delays his friend was experiencing in getting a visa. His complaint is a reminder of the degree to which even the highest level Saudi officials are preoccupied with the question of U.S. visas, where a dysfunctional security advisory process, in particular, causes unconscionable delays and negatively impacts bilateral relationships. End Summary.

QUARTET MEETING IN TRIESTE "USEFUL"  
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[1](#)2. (C) Saudi Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Dr. Nizar Madani characterized the recent G-8 Quartet meeting in Trieste with Arab Foreign Ministers as "useful," adding that it "came at the right time," i.e. on the heels of the Arab Foreign Ministers' meeting in Cairo. The Arab FMs, he commented, had come to Trieste with an "optimistic" outlook, and the ideas presented by Special Envoy Mitchell, Tony Blair, and the European delegations created an "encouraging" atmosphere. Nonetheless, the Saudis were still waiting for concrete action and Netanyahu's recent speech had been

received negatively, as an example of "disappointing" Israeli behavior that dampened Arab hopes.

13. (C) Charge (Ambassador Erdman) responded that Netanyahu's speech had contained both positive and negative elements, and it was important to distinguish between negotiating preconditions and negotiating objectives. The negative elements were largely negotiating objectives, which obviously could only be achieved with the agreement of the Palestinian side. Charge then reviewed the positive elements of Netanyahu's speech, noting they had created an area of common ground we should build on. While acknowledging Netanyahu's apparent acceptance of the two-state principle, Madani countered that Netanyahu's Palestinian state was a "ghost" state, not a real one. He also questioned the current Israeli government's commitment to finding a solution, noting Netanyahu's hard-line comments on Jerusalem the previous day.

14. (C) Charge noted that Israel was a vibrant democracy whose leaders ultimately had to respond to the wishes of the Israeli people. In this context, it was important for Arabs to send a clear, consistent message, through statements and concrete gestures, concerning their desire for peace. This would mobilize Israel's various peace constituencies and put pressure on Israel's leaders to take steps to advance peace. Everyone, including our Arab friends, had a responsibility to take steps to create a positive atmosphere for negotiations. Charge stressed that as the President told the King, we needed help. We couldn't do this ourselves.

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MIDDLE EAST PEACE: YES, WE CAN,  
BUT PLEASE WORK ON THE ISRAELIS  
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15. (C) Madani said that the Arab countries were ready for peace "more than at any time in the past." The current situation, he said, was "an historic opportunity" that we "can't miss." He praised President Obama's decision to focus on the issue early in his tenure, adding that whatever progress could be made "must happen in the beginning" since later in his term "things won't be as solid as they are now." He expressed confidence in President Obama's "will to enter history" as a facilitator of Middle East peace. "We are ready," he said, "you will find all the support you can from Saudi Arabia. Now work on the other side." He added, "What is it your President says? Yes we can!"

...IF ONLY THE PALESTINIANS CAN WORK THINGS OUT  
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16. (C) Despite his upbeat remarks, Madani acknowledged that starting negotiations while the Palestinian side remained divided would be "unhelpful," and that it was incumbent upon the Arabs to present a united front. He expressed disappointment with the postponement of the next round of Palestinian reconciliation talks to late August; dodged a question as to whether Syria was being helpful vis-a-vis Hamas; and said the Saudis were "relying on the Egyptians" to pursue Palestinian reconciliation. Asked about a scenario where the PA might negotiate a deal on its own, thereby putting pressure on Hamas to accept such a deal, he said "we prefer to focus on reconciliation." Internal Palestinian divisions were a point of critical weakness, and reconciliation remained difficult because in the end it came down to willingness to give up power. Regarding the Fatah 6th Party Congress scheduled for early August, Charge noted that the U.S. strongly supported Fatah's reform efforts and hoped that these would help renew and rebuild Fatah's credibility, legitimacy, and confidence in the eyes of the Palestinian public (Reftel A).

#### HARIRI'S PROSPECTS ARE PROMISING

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17. (C) Madani, who is not a key Saudi player on this issue, said the Saudis were "optimistic" regarding Lebanese PM-designate Saad Hariri's prospects for forming a government. They expected the new government to be one of "national conciliation" rather than technocrats, and Syria should be discouraged from meddling in Lebanese government formation. The King's planned visit to Syria had been postponed for precisely that reason, in order to signal Syria that rapprochement with the Kingdom could not advance unless Syria refrained from unhelpful meddling. Charge said we strongly believed there should be no visit to Damascus by Hariri until after both government formation and a vote of confidence. In this regard, it was important, in addition, that we give Hariri time to work out his own solution so that he is empowered over the longer term as Prime Minister. In response to Charge's request that the Saudi's consider additional funding to the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF), Madani agreed that building the LAF's capacity was key to Lebanese security and counter-balancing Hizballah, and promised to look into the possibility of funding the purchase and transfer from Jordan of the U.S.-built M60A3 tanks (Reftel B).

#### SYRIA: SO FAR SO GOOD

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18. (C) Regarding Saudi-Syrian rapprochement, Madani said relations were steadily improving and there were improvements in Syrian behavior compared to a year ago. (He did not cite any specific examples of this improvement.) Although Saudi-Syrian relations were better, they (the Saudis) could not directly or comfortably discuss sensitive issues such as Syrian support for Hizballah at this point. "Syria-Iran relations can't change overnight," he said, while Syria could encourage Iran to avoid interfering in Arab problems.

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#### IRAN: NOT YET CLEAR IF IRAN IS IN A PRE-1979 SITUATION

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19. (C) Asked about the situation in Iran, Madani said there were two schools of thought. According to one school, the current post-election unrest was an "important development" that would lead to "important results," possibly signaling the beginning of radical change. Initial skepticism about events in 1979 was proof this theory should not be completely discounted. According to the second school, Madani continued, it was a "tempest in a teapot," and the feuding groups could settle their differences without harming the overall stability of the regime. While anticipating some lasting effect, he said that the extent of any changes remained unclear. "There are new developments every day, so it won't take long" to determine where things were headed. Madani added that while Saudi Arabia did not like the current regime in Iran, instability there was not in the long-term interest of Saudi Arabia.

#### AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN: YOU CAN COUNT ON US, SORT OF

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110. (C) Per Reftel C, Charge stressed the importance of continued international support for Afghanistan, both in the period leading up to and after the August 20 Presidential elections. Madani expressed strong satisfaction with the joint statement from the recent Support Group meeting in Trieste and said that Saudi Arabia would continue to participate in further meetings of the Group. On Pakistan, Charge noted the USG's significant contributions to aiding Pakistani IDPs, totaling approximately two-thirds of the international call, adding that the U.S. hoped its friends

would also do their share to support the effort. Madani was non-committal regarding further Saudi aid to Pakistan.

VISAS: GOOD EFFORT, BUT WE STILL HAVE CONCERNS  
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¶11. (C) After praising the overall positive nature of U.S.-Saudi bilateral relations, Madani expressed concern over the length and complexity of the U.S. visa process. He said his friend, a former Deputy Finance Minister and Shoura council member with a Ph.D. from the U.S., had been waiting "more than two months" for a visa decision. Charge said we understood Saudi concerns and were taking steps to accelerate the visa issue process and expand visa services, while noting that there was more we needed to do. Madani welcomed these steps but strongly urged continued U.S. attention to Saudi visa issues.

ERDMAN